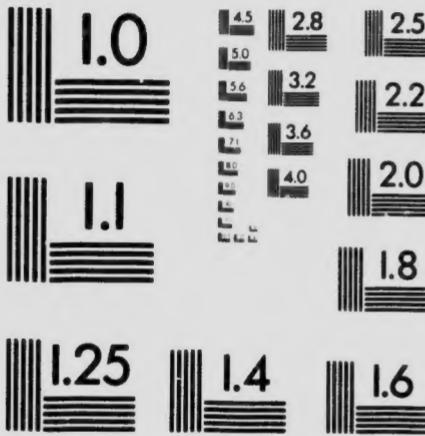


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Nature and Self-Sacrifice

A STUDY

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Foreword

At the request of the Conference I surrender this address to be . . . is a message of the Conference to the people. If it gives . . . glimpse of the multiplied glories of the works of God, if it spells out before men the gospel of the fields and uncovers for them the sacrament of nature, if it does anything to promote the spirit which has led men often in history 'not to count life and possessions as not dear unto themselves when great causes have called and if it helps the coming of that better day when the Church of God shall scarce dare to sing a doxology—as long as the horrors of vice, the 'evils of commercialism, the fester of the slum and the pale faces of the hungry poor stand rebukingly before us, I shall rejoice. "At this parable of mine has been called into the wider light.

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On this Sacramental occasion I wish to call your attention to some facts not emphasized in the past, and to the relations existing between some of the facts of Science and some of the highest ideas in religion.

I shall first remark that modern science has drawn the lines of universal law so close that God is either everywhere, or He is nowhere. The phosphates in the soil nourishing yonder plant (pointing to a Calla Lily adorning the desk) are the same, obeying the same laws and exhibiting the same powers as the phosphates in the brain which makes conscious thought and emotion possible. Therefore, if God is to be found anywhere in human passion, hope or prayer He is also to be found in the bloom of yonder plant. The methods of response of the living matter in the lily are the same in nature as the methods of response which make possible in human

W. D. E. S.

nerves, and human brain, those reactions which we call the pangs of conscience and the bliss of holy joy. We may further say that the chemistry of our Earth is found to be identical with the chemistry of the stars blazing in the farthest heavens. These are but examples of the fact that all nature is bound together into one whole, that the same force and the same law govern all and the one thought is regnant everywhere.

I shall hope that one result of our discussion may be to put an end to the Christian Atheism, as I sometimes call it, which implicitly banishes God from His natural world as when men say "It is only natural,--God is not in that."

If a carpenter be sad of heart it makes a difference in the style of the shavings which curl from the lip of his plane. The joy of a writer's soul affects not only the construction of his sentences, but also the stroke of his pen. Can it be, that God has made this world, and that no suggestion of His feeling has crept into it? Men tell us that Nature has no pity, that she is merciless, governed only by law, but we can at once answer that man is a part of Nature, and man feels pity, and performs deeds of mercy, and deep in his constitution he is made conscious of a mighty obligation to thus exercise his soul. But is it true that outside of man Nature knows no law but selfishness? We are told that self-preservation is Nature's first law, and that the whole round of living things is a realm where individual forms

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struggle each for its own advantage only. It has been argued that we should not apply these terms borrowed from human life to Nature, and that therefore we should not say that she is cruel, selfish, or unselfish. All I care rigidly to insist upon is that Nature "goes through the motions" in a pantomime of selfishness, and also, as I hope to show, a pantomime of unselfish self-sacrifice for the good of others. From this pantomime we read our parable.

I shall first call your attention to what happens among the microscopic cells, the individuals of which are so small in many cases that 1,200 to 2,000 individuals placed side by side reach but one inch. When observed under the microscope under favorable conditions, each cell is found to live its life of activity and evident enjoyment. When it eats it can be seen to eat with gusto. Down in this world of silence (for we rise very high in the realm of organic things before living creatures have a voice) what happens? One of these individuals living its happy life would seem to have no reason why it should not live on in this way its individual life forever, but, after a while a sober thought seems to possess it. It becomes quiescent, and after a while cleavage lines are found to be developing in it and it sacrifices its individual existence and becomes two. The individual dies, that a race may begin. Further, this is the essential act in the multiplication of living forms everywhere even among the highest living things. It is the essential thing in all growth, for if through exercise my

muscle grows, it is because some individual cells have ceased to be, and have become two.

When we come to study plant life this principle exhibits itself in another form. When a seed is sown in our gardens, it breaks through the soil having begun to develop its roots under ground, and soon spreads a leaf or two in the face of the genial sun. Certain it is that the root is not living for itself; the leaf is gathering nourishment, is enriching the sap of the plant that more stem and other leaves may come and these leaves also do not live for themselves, and so on as we pass higher, till we come to the calyx. There the sepals do not exist for their own sakes, nor do the splendid petals, nor do the important stamens, but all of them live for the sake of the new seed, the young life which is developing in the ovary of the plant. So evident is this that no teacher can discuss with his class the relation of these parts without discussing them in some way such as this. Is self-preservation therefore the only law of the leaf in its growth, or of the petals? This becomes still more suggestive when we remember that each leaf is an organized community of cells of various classes who live together, each kind performing different functions in the life of the community, and this whole complex society lives for the sake of other communities in which are found the purpose for which the whole plant exists. Is not such an act of self-sacrifice impressive enough?

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You are all acquainted with the way the familiar turnip grows in our fields. With marvellous vigour it struggles to live; it spreads its broad and luscious leaves to the sun, killing out in the shade many other forms of life; it runs its roots three and four feet underground, till at last it becomes greatly swollen in form and fat capitalist of nourishment. If, however, it be planted another year a change seems to have come over the spirit of its life; it no longer spreads its broad leaves to the light, but it grows instead very meager and angular ones. It no longer gathers nourishment and adds to its bulk, but with great vigour it begins to pay out that accumulated nourishment and develops therefrom rapidly growing stocks, and surmounts all with a rich profusion of bloom and produces a multitude of seeds, till at last the rotund bulb has been reduced to a shrunken tough woody remnant. It has died in order that the turnip race might be kept alive upon the earth. If, therefore, we regard its first year's life as a self-regarding life, and such it seems to be, in what terms should we describe this second year's life when that feature has disappeared and it exhibits self-sacrifice unto death.

This act is by no means uncommon, for all our annual plants are plants which each year die in the act of perpetuating their race.

In the realm of physiology this truth finds many illustrations. Does the heart beat for itself and busily pump the endless stream of blood for its own advantage? Does the stomach gather nourishment for itself

and does the eye catch images for itself, or do any of the groups of cells in those complex organized communities, which we call organs, live and function for their own sakes? Do they not work for the good of the whole? Does even the regnant brain live wholly for its own sake? Does it not serve the hand and foot, and instantly answer the call of any part for help? Self-preservation is not the universal law here except through service to the good of the whole group of communities which we call the body? Should any less worthy a model be taken for human society? Another example: There are special cells growing side by side, and if their growth be traced, it is found that some of them become bulky with stored nourishment, and at a certain time they begin to pay out these stores to nourish a sister cell, at first on an equality with themselves; they dwindle while the favored sister cell grows, and becomes the ancestral cell of a new life. Have you never seen any act of self-sacrifice such as this in a human family, where a number of brothers and sisters remain at home and labor in order that another, who has shown some promise may go to college and live before the world and shine?

Let me now turn to what may be called the very romance of modern physiology.

It is well known, that if a knife make a gash in our flesh, and upon it there should be any germs of a virulent type, these will begin to grow and multiply in the rich furrow. How the tidings are carried we know not.

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but certain it is when the dangerous brood begin to multiply and attack the cells of the body, that from all around in countless hosts the white corpuscles of the blood hurry to the front and throw themselves upon the intruders, till at last they die by thousands in the struggle, and we wipe away from the wound the pus which is nothing more than the multitudinous mass of corpses of these brave defenders of the body which have died upon the bloody field. Not more truly did the sons of Britain, Canada and Australia hurry to the South African veldt, when the Empire was attacked, than do these unsuspected heroes mass themselves together for the body's defence, and why should they do it? It is evident that we may learn from these the same lesson which we draw from the highest life we know, namely, this--if the white corpuscles "lay down their lives for us, we ought also"--if need be--"lay down our lives for the brethren."

From these forms of life we may rise to those higher forms of life where dim forms of consciousness begin. In all the higher forms of life parenthood calls for conscious self-sacrifice. The tigers in the jungle will for long hours forage for their young. Everywhere motherhood means sacrifice. Why is it, that the mother bird will risk her life for the defence of her young? Does she stop to reason that her nestlings represent the race that is to be, and that therefore she should die for them? No, great Nature--to whom service and sacrifice are dear words--speaks through her, and she does it, 'she

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knows not why. Many a common man has been picked up and after drilling sent to the battlefield and some day seeing a comrade in danger he has rushed through a storm of whistling bullets and has borne him to safety, and to his great astonishment he afterwards wears the Victoria Cross. He also did not reason it out, but a noble impulse was born in him in one glorious moment, which was worth all the rest of his life up to that time.

In human life Nature has ingrained this principle so deeply within us, that the world knows no greater name than loving self-sacrifice.

The careless and secular man of the streets--the man of brutal and sensual life, and even the thoughtless giddy ones, will all alike pause and feel a moment of reverence whenever one man nobly dies for his fellows. Whenever they see an undeniable act of self abnegation for the good of others they are ready to build monuments which consecrate our public places to keep alive the memory of the noble deed. This is the name which is above every name, and this name is the name of Him before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. On a skull-shaped hill outside of Jesusalem, three crosses stood, and on the central one He died, who is known as the Great Brother, who in the faithful speaking of truth, in His defence of the needy, in His compassion for the poor, in His fidelity to the great things of life died to save the world. What have we here then, but in His act of

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service unto death the perfect form of the self-sacrifice which runs all through Nature --- Nature which has decreed that the predominantly selfish type of life must perish from the earth, and which has ingrained in the very constitution of living things the principle of self-sacrifice. Jesus Christ on the occasion when the Greeks sought him at the feast linked together the life of the wheat of which he said: "Except a corn of wheat fall to the ground and die it abideth alone," but if it beareth much fruit," with our own lives, when He says that the selfish life in its very worthlessness and in its lack of fruitfulness is the lost life, "He that saveth his life loseth it, and he that loseth his life for My sake, finds it," and also with His own, when he says: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Sometimes when I have stood beside a field of wheat which had been growing all the summer long with rich and luscious green in every part of the plants, as they struggled each for nourishment in the soil and for sunlight and more nourishment from the air, it seemed to be but a self regarding life in each, but one day over the whole field a strange change of color spreads, and every part of each plant loaded with rich supplies of nourishment begins to pay it out and to push it upwards and pack it away in the kernels of the head, till at last the whole plant is blanched white in death. It has died that the wheat race may live still upon the earth and the nations be fed. Then have I seen the giant reapers marching merrily up and down the fields for in this act of

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self-devotion on the part of the wheat there is hope for the world.

When Jesus Christ knelt in Gethsamene did He who had spoken the secret of the life of the wheat feel there in the still life of the garden where self-sacrifice was written on every listening leaf the sympathy of their life with the passion of His soul? And while the disciples slept, and by their dullness, forbade Him the help of human sympathy, did He gain any comfort from the silent life around Him? Sidney Lanier with true poetic insight in his Ballad of the Trees has expressed this sympathy:

Into the woods my Master went, clean
forspent, forspent,
Forspent with grief and shame.
Into the woods my Master came, forspent
with grief and shame.
But the Olive trees were not blind to Him.
The little grey leaves were kind to Him.
The thorn tree had a mind to Him.
As into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went, and He
was well content.
Content with grief and shame.
Out of the woods my Master went, content
with grief and shame.
When death and shame would woo Him last,
From under the trees they drew Him last.
'Twas on a tree they slew Him last
When out of the woods He came.

We have joined to-day in that beautiful service of the Church which we call the Sacrament. (Holding up a piece of bread from the Sacramental plate.) This bread once was

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wheat growing vigorously under the summer sun. All the summer long under sunshine and storm it was living for us, at last it was cut down and bruised and broken and made into bread for us, and we take this devoted life for the strengthening of our bodies---so Christ lived for us; He died for us. No wonder in large poetic fire He could say: "This is My Body which is given for you." (then lifting a Sacramental cup.) This wine once grew rich under summer sun where on the trellis a grapevine hung; it reddened, as rain and dew and sunlight fell upon it through days of light and through days of gloom. It grew richer and richer still, till at last its life blood was shed, and in this cup of holy memory, it is given to us. It lived for us; it died for us---so did Christ. "This do ye as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me." The parable is easily read. In this Sacrament in vivid symbol we have the heart of the Gospel set forth. These specimens chosen from Nature's rich field, tell alike Nature's great lesson and the Gospel's great truth that a self-sacrificing God loves man. "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

There is therefore a Cross in Nature, dim and feeble in outline at first, but through ages gathering more and more of meaning till at last it finds broad expression in the nobilities of human life and its crown in the act of Him who gave His life to save the world.

Men speak of these emblems which tell us of a God who suffers to save and say that Christ in Real Presence is here. Yes, indeed,

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without Him was not anything made, that was made. God is everywhere or nowhere and surely He is present in the natural emblems the secret of whose life so closely symbolizes the self-sacrificing love, which constitutes the highest glory of Divinity and without which the Divine cannot exist for man. Man can dream of nothing higher; he can really worship nothing less. The noblest thing on earth is the Christlike man; the noblest being in heaven is the Christlike God. The Divine is here.

They have called it the Holy Mystery and a mystery it is, hid through ages and generations but now made manifest to all men through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a Mystery of love.

We call it, too, a Sacrament, an oath of allegiance. It is said that Proctor during the Peninsular War was asked by Wellington if he would lead the troops to storm a difficult position --General Proctor knew why it was the General had asked him. The two men looked into each other's eyes for the moment, and General Proctor said: "General, give me a grasp of your conquering right hand and I will do it." They shook hands in silence, and Proctor accomplished the awful task and won the day for England.

Brethren, some of you bear the marks of self-sacrifice upon your faces. None of us know what yet lies before us.

Is there no call for sacrifice from you who as preachers and pastors are seeking to see justice done among your people? Are there no economic injustices which will bite

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into your soul and call forth from you the rebuke of faithful words? Will it be easy for you to preach a gospel for the day when men hold wealth which has been created through the capture of the unearned increment and the consequent absorption of the patrimony of others? Is there no sacrifice demanded if by our fidelity we are to prevent a flabby religiosity taking the place of religion, true and undefiled? Are there not a thousand ways in which the best within us shall be called out for holy expenditure with no thought of reward? Are there no rebukes for the idle rich, the paupers who live on the world receiving everything and giving nothing and for those who in business and politics make the law of God of none effect through the traditions of men? Is there no sacrifice demanded, if in the secret and the open places of our own lives we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the vices of the fashionable religious and commercial world in which we live. Can we yet call our civilization an embodiment of the spirit of Christ? Are we yet fitted to disciple the noblest nations of the heathen world? Are there no deep waters through which the Church must pass before a better day dawns? To these great paths of service are we called and such is still the burden of the prophet

To-day in this holy Sacrament we have grasped the conquering right hand of our Master. Let us go forth in His strength to do what the Apostle means by his great phrase, namely: "to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ." Not all has

yet been done which is required to save the world. We must add our sacrifice to His in holy service for man, and thus enter into "fellowship with Him in His sufferings being made conformable unto His death." Not easy is the road, but great is the reward in the enrichment which comes to the soul, the glory of a holy character, the crown of life whose beauty fadeth not away.



